

BENHS FIELD MEETINGS

The Sheepleas, near West Horsley, Surrey, 16 June 1991

Leader: **A. J. Halstead**. Six members and guests attended on a rather overcast and, at times wet day. This limited the insect activity at what is normally a rich site consisting of unimproved chalk meadows and deciduous woods. Perversely, the skies cleared as the sun set, resulting in a cold night for the two members who came for light trapping. Only 26 species of macros came to light, mostly in small numbers. These included *Horisme vitalbata* (D. & S.), *Sphinx ligustri* L., *Deilephila elpenor* (L.) and *Stauropus fagi* (L.).

Among the more interesting insects recorded during the day were the beetles *Sinodendron cylindricum* (L.) (Lucanidae) and *Mordellistena brevicauda* (Boheman) (Mordellidae). Some local flies were noted, mostly by Peter Chandler. These included *Ectrepesthoneura hirta* (Winn.) and *Sceptonia tenuis* Edwards (both Mycetophilidae), *Symphoromyia immaculata* (Meig.) (Rhagionidae), *Thereva plebeja* (L.) (Therevidae), *Thecophora atra* (F.) (Conopidae), *Chyliza vittata* (Meig.) (Psilidae), *Lyciella laeta* (Zett.) (Lauxaniidae), *Eccoptomera longiseta* (Meig.) (Heleomyzidae), *Geomyza venusta* (Meig.) (Opomyzidae) and *Anthomyza andersonni* Rohacek (Anthomyzidae). The sawflies recorded during the meeting included *Hartigia linearis* (Schrank) (Cepidae) and *Allantus rufocinctus* (Retz.) (Tenthredinidae).

Nunhead Cemetery, London SE15, 27 July 1991

Leader: **R. A. Jones**. Three members and four 'guests' appeared for the daytime session, on a sunny and warm summer's day. An initial stroll up the avenue of limes to the ruined chapel produced *Abdera biflexuosa* (Curtis) (Coleoptera: Melandryidae), *Axinotarsus marginalis* (Laporte de Castelnaud) (Coleoptera: Melyridae) and *Issus coleoptratus* (F.) (Hemiptera: Issidae), all by sweeping. The dead sycamores, affected by sooty bark disease produced several specimens of *Synchitya separanda* (Reitter) (Coleoptera: Colydiidae) and *Enicmus brevicornis* (Mann.) (Coleoptera: Lathridiidae). The peculiar plant hopper *Asiraca clavicornis* (F.) (Hemiptera: Delphacidae) was taken by general sweeping and a single specimen of *Volucella zonaria* (Poda) (Diptera: Syrphidae) was spotted on the wing. A large poplar, heavily overgrown with ivy produced several interesting flies including *Neopachygaster meromelaena* Austen (= *N. orbitalis* Wahlberg) (Stratiomyidae), *Solva marginata* (Meig.) (Xylomyidae), *Gnophomyia viridipennis* (Gimm.) (Tipulidae) and *Lonchaea fugax* Becker (Lonchaeidae). Only one small light trap was operated at night, proving to be rather a disappointment.

Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, 10 May 1992

Leaders: **R. Gaunt & K. N. A. Alexander**. The area of the Forest selected for this joint field meeting with the Gloucestershire Invertebrate Group was Orles Wood and Slade Bottom, to the north-east of St Briavels, and draining westwards into the Wye Valley. Orles Wood is largely young conifer plantation established on poorly drained common land, but with wide open marshy rides and vigorous growth of native broadleaved trees and shrubs. The geology is clay overlying limestone. Some interesting spiders have been found in recent years and the aim of the visit was to discover if other groups are also of interest here. Nothing of especial note was however found, the most interesting finds being the thornbug *Centrotus cornutus* (L.), and the beetles *Aphthona melancholica* Weise and *Vincenzellus ruficollis* (Panzer).

The nearby Slade Bottom proved to be a much richer area, with old ash, wych elm, hazel coppice developed along a deep stream valley, and the ground flora dominated by ramsoms, *Allium ursinum* L., with some herb-Paris, *Paris quadrifolia* L. This is the only site west of the Severn for the rare calcicole snail *Ena montana* (Draparnaud) and it was seen in plenty during the afternoon. Amongst the wide range of insects recorded were the beetles *Endomychus coccineus* (L.), *Apoderus coryli* (L.), and *Barynotus moerens* (F.), and the flies *Otitus guttata* (Meig.) and *Portevinia maculata* (Fall.).

In the head of the stream valley, above the old coppice, is an area of old pasture woodland with many large old beech and ash, and plentiful dead and decaying timber. Larvae of the beetles *Pediacus dermestoides* (F.) and *Stenagostus rhombeus* (Olivier) were discovered in the decaying beeches, and a very fresh *Brachypalpoides lenta* (Meig.) hoverfly was found on the ground.

We would like to record our thanks to the Forestry Commission for permission to enter these woods.

Bookham and Ashted Commons, Surrey, 20 June 1992

Leaders: **I. S. Menzies** and **J. A. Owen**. Six members and two guests of the BENHS were able to join the leaders during this field day. Despite a rather cold wind there were long sunny spells and no rain.

The morning, which was spent on Bookham Common (National Trust), was off to a good start when several white-letter hairstreaks *Strymonidia w-album* (Knoch) were seen flying actively around bushy growths of English elm, *Ulmus minor* Miller, adjacent to the railway station. In the same vicinity the pentatomid bug, *Eurydema oleraceum* (L.), was found on garlick mustard, *Alliaria petiolata* (Bieb.) and the flea beetle *Longitarsus lycopi* (Foud.) on ground ivy, *Glechoma hederacea* L., both local species being present in some numbers. Other notable species seen were *Zeugophora subspinosa* (F.) and *Agrilus angustulus* (Ill.). A single female example of the beautiful jewel beetle *Agrilus viridis* (L.) was also found in the aboretum, beaten from a young sawallow which had fallen in a recent gale.

The party enjoyed lunch as guests of the London Natural History Society, represented by Brad Ashby who personally organized refreshing cups of tea and made the facilities of the LNHS hut available. Mr Ian Swiney, the warden, was unfortunately unable to be present. He has recently been organizing the clearance of scrub and 'supernumerary' trees to allow more sunlight to penetrate around the rides, ponds and (previously) open grassy areas, a policy especially appreciated by entomologists.

The afternoon was spent on Ashted Common which was approached from the 'Star' public house on the Chessington-Leatherhead road. The party was welcomed on behalf of the Corporation of London, which now owns the Common, by Mr Bob Warnock the Community Woodlands Officer. Emergence holes of *Phymatodes testaceus* (L.) and *Agrilus pannonicus* (P. & M.) were evident in several of the ancient damaged oaks, adults of both beetles being eventually discovered. The party was pleased to see several adult *Agrilus viridis* (L.) sunning themselves on leaves of fallen sawallows in two different sites. They were very alert and difficult to capture. *Axinotarsus marginalis* (Lap. de Castel) was swept from the grassy footpath margins, and single examples of *Mathinus balteatus* Suff. and *Lyctus brunneus* (Steph.) were also seen. Only a few of the curious malacodermatid beetle *Lymexylon navale* (L.) were seen around the dead oaks in the late afternoon, their flight presumably discouraged by a cold and blustery northeast wind. They were seen flying in hundreds around these trees at the same time (4.30–5.30 p.m.) on the next afternoon which was warmer and less windy.

A satisfactory conclusion to the afternoon was achieved when a particularly resplendent *Agrilus*, which had attracted both admiration and photographic expertise as it sat on a willow leaf, turned out to be a female *Agrilus pannonicus* and not *A. viridis* as was first thought!

All the lists sent in will be appropriately communicated to the National Trust and Corporation of London.

Clymping Gap, West Sussex, 27 June 1992

Leader: **R. Morris**. Five members and friends attended the daytime meeting which was most rewarding. An interesting assemblage of bees and wasps was found, including many of the typical coastal species such as *Megachile maritima* (Kirby) and its cleptoparasite *Coelioxys vectis* Curt. Amongst the more interesting discoveries were the wasp *Astata pinguis* (Dahlbom) and its cleptoparasite, the ruby tailed wasp *Hedychridium cupreum* (Dahlbom), both of which were found in good numbers. The fly fauna was disappointing but we were rewarded with excellent views of the white letter hairstreak *Strymonida w-album* (Knoch) at hogweed flowers.

The evening meeting was attended by nine members and a strong contingent of the Clymping Gap Preservation and Field Recording Society. Eight lights were run and a good assembly of moths was attracted. The sand dune fauna was well represented, including good numbers of the shore wainscot *Mythymna litoralis* Curt. and a few rosy wave *Scopula emutaria* Hübn. Amongst other species of interest, the Kent black arches *Meganola albula* D. & S. was one of the more noteworthy.

This meeting was arranged courtesy of the Clymping Gap Preservation and Field Recording Society and the West Sussex Ranger Service. I would like to thank Sarah Patton and John Knight in particular for their enthusiastic help in arranging and running this meeting. Clymping Gap offers great potential and would be well worth future visits.

Holme Fen National Nature Reserve, Cambridgeshire, 25 July 1992

Leader: **Paul Waring**. The leader was joined by five members and the reserve warden for the afternoon session and a further eight members and friends for the night work. Holme Fen NNR (640 acres) consists mainly of birch woodland (both species) which has developed naturally on the peat of what was formerly Whittlesey Mere. After the mere was drained in the 1850s this site was used for agriculture and then abandoned. It has been described as the finest development of such birch woodland in lowland Britain (Ratcliffe, 1977). There are also remnants of raised mire species, including *Sphagnum* sp. and ling heather *Calluna vulgaris* (L.). Two meres were excavated in the late 1970s and these have developed a marginal vegetation of common reed *Phragmites australis* (Cav.) and other emergent and aquatic plants.

As we gathered in the lay-by at the entrance to Jackson's Covert a group of five migrant hawk dragonflies *Aeshna mixta* Lat. circled over our heads and a large greenish cerambycid beetle, which had landed on the bumper of one of the cars, provided interest for the photographers among us. Its identification awaits the results of the photographs. The beetle was left to continue on its travels. Another large cerambycid beetle *Saperda carcharias* (L.) was found nearby. The warden Alan Bowley then kindly showed us around the main features of the site. The dykes and roadside verges around the reserve were a riot of flowering thistles, brambles, burdock, willowherb and bindweed and the flowers of the first three in particular were alive with insects. There had been a large emergence of peacock butterflies *Inachis io* L.



Fig. 1. Some of the day-time party watching a group of migrant hawker dragonflies, *Aeshna mixta*, by the entrance to Jackson's Covert. Left to right: Gavin Boyd, Peter Tebbutt, Diana and Peter Sharpe, and the warden of the reserve, Alan Bowley. Photo P. Waring.

during the week and one could probably have counted a hundred or more by walking along these dykes. The peacocks were joined by a few small tortoiseshells *Aglais urticae* L., large and small whites *Pieris brassicae* L. and *P. rapae* L. and a couple of worn red admirals *Vanessa atalanta* L. On the previous Thursday 23 July large numbers of silver Y moths *Autographa gamma* L. had appeared in the area so perhaps there had been an influx of *atalanta* also. Equally, both species are breeding in the vicinity. Several brown hawker dragonflies *Aeshna grandis* (L.) were seen flying up and down the dykes. On the edge of a mere a single red-eyed damselfly *Erythromma najas* (Hanse.) was spotted along with the more abundant common blue damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum* (Charp.).

As we walked through the fairly shaded rides among the birch trees in the centre of the reserve we were passed by a comma *Polygonia c-album* L. and a meadow brown *Maniola jurtina* L. and encountered a fine male ruddy darter *Sympetrum sanguineum* (Müller) as we entered a bracken-filled clearing. The area of saw-sedge *Cladium mariscus* (L.) is shaded by birch trees and there was little in the way of nectar sources to attract insects there but a lesser cream wave *Scopula immutata* L. was flushed, to add to the growing list of commoner moths which was accumulating. It is also worth recording the numbers of dingy footman *Eilema griseola* Hübn. seen basking on the foliage of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* (L.), bramble *Rubus* spp. and other low plants by day and visiting the flowers of burdock *Arctium minus* Bernh., hemp agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum* (L.) and others once it got dark. We must have seen two dozen. The leader has found the larvae commonly in leaf-litter on the ground on nearby Woodwalton Fen in September.

Further into the wood the main ground cover suddenly changed from bracken to brambles with the flowers attracting yet more peacocks. We watched a southern hawker dragonfly *Aeshna cyanea* (Müller) chasing a silver Y which escaped. A muntjac deer *Muntiacus reevesi* crossed the ride in front of us. There are also a few Chinese water deer *Hydropotes inermis* at Holme Fen but not as many as at Woodwalton Fen and we did not see any.



Fig. 2. Hanging up virgin female oak egg, *Lasiocampa quercus* in one of the heathy mown clearings in the woodland, in the hope of assembling males. Photo P. Waring.

We moved on to the area of heather which is kept open by mowing. Our objective was to hang up a virgin female oak egg *Lasiocampa quercus* L. which Peter Sharpe had brought with us in the hope of assembling males. From eight cocoons the leader had obtained for this purpose, only one adult had so far emerged, a male! The leader has been investigating the status of this species in the area since the capture of an adult female in his garden Robinson trap in 1991 at Werrington, some 15 km away to the north (Waring, 1992). Of the few records for this area, Holme has produced most. During 1954 Blackie (1956) noted both adults and larvae but he gives the impression they were more abundant in some years than in others. Barry Dickerson the local county moth recorder for the vice-county of Huntingdonshire had not heard of a recent record in 17 years of recording until Nancy Mason reported a female in her light-trap at Ramsey Heights in 1991. Subsequently, the leader found two more females in his garden trap on the nights of 21 and 28 July 1992 respectively which suggests they are breeding locally and the late Bill Turner has reported his find, in 1952, of a larva on hawthorn near the school in Werrington. In addition Malcolm Hillier informs me that he has taken two females at actinic light (on 10.vii.1983 and 7.viii.1984) at Helpston just 4 km north-west of Werrington. Malcolm began trapping the Helpston site in 1983 and has continued without any major interruptions to date.

By the time we reached the heather area and set up the virgin oak egg (16.30 hrs) it was a little too late in the afternoon to expect the best results and it was also somewhat overcast. When we returned to the female an hour later there was brief excitement when a foxy coloured moth flew up from the bracken below, but it was probably a large yellow underwing *Noctua pronuba* L. and no confirmed male oak egg was recorded. However the same female was given to Kevin Warrington, one of the estate workers who joined us later, and he succeeded in attracting a wild male with her at Woodwalton Fen in compartment 77 towards the south end of the reserve at 14.45 hrs on 27.vii.1992.

As dusk came on and people sorted out their light-trapping gear the leader found a fresh female emerald damselfly *Lestes sponsa* (Hanse.) at rest, the only one seen during the day. It was by the dyke along Holme Lode. The dyke edges showed

dramatically the effect of a regime of cutting alternate lengths at different frequency. Those cut in the last year or so were dominated by meadow-sweet *Filipendula ulmaria* (L.) with a little yellow meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum* L., upon which the marsh carpet *Perizoma sagittata* F. occurs. The leader last saw it there in 1987 and 1988. This visit was a little too early for larvae and none were found. The lengths not so recently cut were dominated by common reed and were occupied by noisy reed warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*.

Dead calm conditions with a mackerel sky prevailed as we set up traps. Both tawny and long-eared owls *Strix aluco* and *Asio otus* were heard as two of us netted at dusk for any late dentated pug *Anticollax sparsata* Treits. around good stands of the larval food-plant yellow loose-strife *Lysimachia vulgaris* L. These plants were also searched for early larvae. The leader found a first-instar larva at Woodwalton Fen on 29.vii.1987 but is not aware of any records so far for Holme Fen. None were found on this meeting even though an actinic trap was also operated all night by the *Lysimachia* but the habitat looked suitable and it would be worth searching again at a slightly better time for this species.

In all, seven lights were operated, including three actinics, two Robinson traps, a home-made Skinner trap and a 125-W MV bulb on a pole over a sheet. The traps were operated in Jackson's Covert, Middle Covert and Holme Lode Covert. In addition Tony Dobson ran an actinic trap and set up three 'wine-ropes' in the bushes by one of the rides in Denton Fen Covert and by about 23.00 hrs the wine-rope at the entrance was covered in moths, including one mere wainscot *Photedes fluxa* Hübn. A total of over one hundred species of moths (including micros) were recorded by members, of which the more interesting species not so far mentioned were large twin-spot carpet *Xanthorhoe quadrifasciata* Clerk, dark spinach *Pelurga comitata* L., scalloped shell *Rheumaptera undulata* L., black arches *Lymantria monacha* L., scarce footman *Eilema complana* L., rosy footman *Miltochrista miniata* Forst., olive *Ipimorpha subtusa* D. & S., double-lobed *Apamea ophiogramma* Esp., brown-veined wainscot *Archanara dissoluta* Treits, fen wainscot *Arenostola phragmitidis* Hübn., oak nycteoline *Nycteola revayana* Scop. and the pyralid *Chilo phagmitella* Hübn.

A single specimen of the birch-feeding tortricid *Epinotia ramella* L. arrived on the sheet in Holme Lode Covert. This is of interest in that it is the first specimen Barry Dickerson has seen in twelve years of recording micros in the area. It is not the first county record however. It is said to be associated with large stands of birch so it should be at home at Holme!

Discussion was lively throughout the day and over the lights at night and the leader would like to thank Alan Bowley, Keith Warrington, Lee Marshal, Peter and Di Sharpe, Peter Tebbutt, Gavin Boyd, Tony Dobson, Rob Partridge, Barry and Teresa Dickerson, Nancy Mason, John Ward and Steve Ward for joining him and making it such a pleasant day out. A full list of the species recorded has been supplied to English Nature and to the Invertebrate Site Register of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

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